

Myth, Memory, and Empire: Reading Napoleon through Turner and Romantic Literature

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Abstract

This article examines the cultural afterlives of Napoleon in early nineteenth-century Britain through the interwoven responses of literature and visual arts, with particular attention to J.M.W. Turner's paintings *The Field of Waterloo* (1818) and *War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet* (1842). Napoleon was not merely a historical figure but a cultural text, endlessly reimagined in poetry, satire, and art. Romantic poets like Southey, Wordsworth, and Scott celebrated his downfall at Waterloo as a providential triumph, while Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and women writers such as Felicia Hemans and Louisa Costello offered more sceptical or tragic reflections on the immense human cost of war that ended his reign. Turner's canvases situate themselves within this contested literary field. *The Field of Waterloo*, directly referencing Byron's stanzas, rejects triumphalist commemoration by foregrounding suffering and grief rather than national glory. Two decades later, *War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet* revisits Napoleon as a diminished yet haunting presence, aligning with Romantic irony, and echoing the ambivalent imagery of contemporary caricatures and poems of exile. Together, these representations show how the Battle of Waterloo and Napoleon's figure became symbolic sites for negotiating questions of empire, masculinity, domestic loss, and national identity. By situating Turner alongside Romantic poets, women writers, and popular caricatures, this study demonstrates how visual and literary texts fashioned Napoleon into a volatile cultural symbol whose shifting meanings expose the contested identities of post-Waterloo Britain.

Keywords:

J.M.W. Turner; Napoleon; Waterloo; Romantic literature; caricature; cultural memory; visual arts.

Introduction

The Battle of Waterloo (1815) and the figure of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) occupy a central place in the historical and cultural imagination of nineteenth-century Europe. While Waterloo was commemorated as the definitive land battle that brought an end to decades of conflict, Napoleon himself continued to provoke fascination, fear, and ambivalence long after his defeat at Waterloo. His transformation from a Revolutionary general to an emperor, from a conqueror to an exile, gave birth to a wide spectrum of responses across Britain and the Continent, ranging from vitriolic caricature and jingoistic celebration to elegiac lament and tragic heroization. For the British audiences in particular, both the battle and the man became sites where questions of national identity, masculinity, power, and loss were articulated and contested.

This article situates the English Romantic painter J.M.W. Turner's (1775-1851) representations of the Waterloo Battle and Napoleon within the larger matrix of literary and artistic responses. Turner's *The Field of Waterloo* (1818) and *War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet* (1842) depart strikingly from the triumphalist narratives that dominated early nineteenth-century Britain. Instead of offering celebratory visions of national victory, Turner confronts the human cost of war, aligning his work with dissenting voices in poetry and prose that challenged the rhetoric of glory and sacrifice. Works of figures like Lord Byron, Felicia Hemans, Louisa Stuart Costello, and Anna Laetitia Barbauld, among others, exposed the devastation of conflict, and foregrounded themes of mourning, exile, and domestic rupture over those of military heroism.

At the same time, this paper explores the multivalent signification of Napoleon's image in the cultural imagination of the period. Caricaturists and satirists like James Gillray and George Cruikshank reduced him to grotesque proportions, in an effort to diffuse the anxieties he inspired through ridicule. Poet William Wordsworth saw in him a betrayal of revolutionary ideals, while Byron constructed him as a figure of tragic grandeur whose exile resonated with the Romantic idea of genius in isolation. Turner drew on this shifting symbolism: in *The Field of Waterloo*, he memorialised anonymous suffering and critiqued the spectacle of war, and in *War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet*,

he reflected on the futility of ambition and the irony of power diminished. By placing Turner in dialogue with his contemporaries and satirical print culture, this article argues that both Waterloo and Napoleon were not static historical subjects but dynamic cultural symbols, constantly reimagined in response to Britain's anxieties and aspirations in the post-war period. Examining these representations together allows us to see how art and literature negotiated questions of history, memory, and identity in the wake of one of the most defining moments of European history.

Napoleon and the Making of National Memory

Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815 is often remembered as the decisive event that closed the Napoleonic era, but the path to that outcome was shaped by a series of earlier campaigns that steadily eroded his power. His decision to invade the Iberian Peninsula in 1807, first in Portugal and later in Spain, proved especially costly, draining manpower, resources, and morale. Significantly, it allowed Britain to engage France more directly on land after Trafalgar, ending a period when hostilities had been largely confined to minor naval skirmishes. Under Sir Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, Anglo-Portuguese forces, supported by Spanish troops, defeated the French at the Battle of Salamanca (1812) and the Battle of Vitoria (1813), forcing them back across the Pyrenees. At the same time, Napoleon's disastrous Russian campaign in 1812 decimated the *Grande Armée* quite literally, leaving France extremely vulnerable. By 1813, a coalition of Russia, Sweden, Austria, and Prussia launched the German campaign, culminating in the three-day Battle of Leipzig (16-19th October 1813). Known as the "Battle of the Nations," the massive confrontation at Leipzig, though often overshadowed by battle at Waterloo, inflicted another crushing defeat. With this defeat, France was invaded from two fronts, Paris fell in early 1814, Napoleon abdicated on 6th April, and the Treaty of Fontainebleau (signed on 11th April) formally exiled him to the Mediterranean island of Elba.

In Britain, Napoleon's abdication and exile provoked a surge of commentary and literary responses. Many were dissatisfied with the leniency shown to him, arguing that such concessions failed to account for the devastation he had caused. Robert Southey,

appointed Poet Laureate in 1813, was especially critical of the decision to extend mercy. In his “Ode, Written During the Negotiations with Buonaparte in January 1814,” Southey insists upon retribution against the “evil” “barbarian,” urging France to cast off its slavery and reclaim its honour through his execution:

Who counsels peace, when Vengeance, like a flood,
Rolls on, no longer now to be repress'd;
When innocent blood
From the four corners of the world cries out
For justice upon one accursed head; (lines 3-7)
...
Death only can for his foul deeds atone; (line 30)

Byron also published an “Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte” in 1814, written immediately after the exile, but his approach differed sharply from Southey’s. Rather than demanding vengeance, Byron laments Napoleon’s voracious appetite for power and blind ambition, which precipitated his downfall and left immense misery in its wake. A figure who was once heroic is reduced to abject smallness:

’Tis done — but yesterday a King!
And arm’d with Kings to strive —
And now thou art a nameless thing:
So abject — yet alive! (lines 1-4)

Other poets responded with relief at the return of long-sought peace across Europe. John Keats, for instance, composed the sonnet “On Peace”— though not published until much later—which looked forward to the newfound liberty and hoped that it would be strong enough to prevent Europe from slipping back into the tyranny of earlier regimes.

From Triumph to Trauma: Poetic Responses to Waterloo

An enduring peace, however, was not secured even after Napoleon’s first exile. On 26th February, 1815 he escaped from Elba and returned to Paris, forcing the restored monarch Louis XVIII to flee. The Allies, assembled at the Congress of Vienna, declared him an outlaw and prepared for renewed conflict. His final defeat came at the Battle of

Waterloo on 18th June, 1815, where Anglo-Prussian forces under the command of the Duke of Wellington and General Blücher brought his reign to a decisive end. The battle itself was not remarkable for either tactical brilliance or the sheer scale of casualties– on that score, the earlier Battle of Leipzig far surpassed it– yet it quickly assumed “a colossal, mythic status, as tragedy, triumph, the close (or beginning) of a historical epoch, and simply as perhaps the definitive land battle of all time” (Jensen 116).

Historian Alan Forrest highlights the contrasting receptions of this outcome in Britain and France. Despite heavy losses on both sides, and the suffering of widows, orphans, and the wounded, France greeted the restored monarchy and allied occupation with understandable restraint. Britain, by contrast, orchestrated elaborate celebrations of victory, with the government actively encouraging a wave of patriotic pride focused specifically on Waterloo (Forrest 354). The campaign held special significance for Britain because, for a nation which largely relied on naval power, it demonstrated the military capacity for success in a major land battle as well. Authoritative narratives, however, tended to overlook the vital role of the Prussian army and German troops in Napoleon’s overthrow (Forrest 357). It must also be remembered that the British opinion was never totally unified in its support for the war and the prolonged conflict. The triumphalist representation of Waterloo in official and artistic discourse should be understood as a strategy to elicit nationalistic pride and foster internal stability in the aftermath of the decades of conflict.

Artistic responses which were overwhelmingly celebratory praised national virtues, the heroism of Wellington, and framed Napoleon’s “blood lust” as a justification for a ‘righteous’ fight. Because the battlefield could be visited in person after the victory, British tourists flocked to the site, eager to experience and walk the ground where both Wellington and Napoleon had stood upon. As Catriona Kennedy observes, the purpose of such visits was “to experience with greater immediacy both the glory and destruction of war” (187). Among the earliest responses was that of Sir Walter Scott, the Scottish novelist whose historical romances transformed war into a chivalric and “heroic spectacle” (Kennedy 174) and secured his immense popularity with the masses.

Scott travelled swiftly to the battlefield, and his verse *The Field of Waterloo* (1815), composed during the journey, attempts to convey the ferocity of the conflict, denounces Napoleon's lust for fame, praises Wellington and his soldiers for their courage, and ends with an encomium to Britain's victory in a 'just cause.' The poem, however, was poorly received and was criticised for its hasty composition and haphazard style.

Southey's *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo* (1816) offered another first-hand account of the battlefield, complete with references to strategically significant sites, and sought to provide readers at home with a coherent narrative of the events of the day. Although the poem acknowledges the grim traces of battle, including decomposing bodies and ruined farmlands, it ultimately remains formulaic in its triumphalism, celebrating both the "great victory" and the "great Commander" Wellington. Southey's fellow Lake Poet Wordsworth responded in a similar ideological vein. His collection of poems called the *Thanksgiving Odes* (1816) reflected a striking political shift from the radical optimism of his earlier works to an increasingly conservative outlook. In *The Prelude* (1805, Books IX–X), Wordsworth had still embraced the Revolution's ideals of liberty and equality, but in the *Odes*, he saw Waterloo and Napoleon's defeat as being divinely sanctioned. As J.R. Watson notes, "in his response to the battle of Waterloo, Wordsworth developed an extreme sense of righteousness. It was not only the downfall of an evil emperor, as he saw it, but a pride in his own country's part in that downfall" (Watson 175).

Wordsworth employed inflated rhetoric to underscore the sacred nature of the battle and to celebrate Napoleon's downfall:

Nor will the God of peace and love

Such martial service disapprove.

...

...Man, arrayed for mutual slaughter,—

Yea, *Carnage is thy daughter!*

(The poem, first published as "Ode-The Morning of the Day Appointed for a General Thanksgiving. January 18, 1816," was later divided into two poems, and the line "Yea, Carnage is thy daughter" subsequently removed.)

Such uncritical admiration, which elides the human suffering of war, illustrates what literary scholar Timothy Ruppert has described as “Britain’s brutal chauvinism” during this period (562). In contrast to poetry that glorified the nation, Byron’s treatment of Waterloo in his epic poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812-1818) offered a pointedly different perspective. The stanzas devoted to the battle in Canto III convey revulsion at the slaughter that ensued. Philip Shaw praises their “political indignation” and “controlled literary intelligence” (30), qualities evident in lines such as:

Fit retribution! Gaul may champ the bit,
And foam in fetters, but *is Earth more free?*
(Canto III, lines 164-65, my emphasis)

Here Byron provides a sceptical counterargument to the dominant jingoistic discourse, questioning whether victory over Napoleon truly brought freedom.

In another canto of *Childe Harold*, Byron describes the battlefield as a “glorious field of grief” (Canto I, line 459), “A scene where mingling foes... boast and bleed” (Canto I, line 462). The futility of the “thousands [who] fall” becomes even more bitter when set against the fact that honour and glory are amassed by a “single name” (Canto I, line 471), the general who commands the troops. In the Waterloo stanzas, Byron rejects the notion of monumentalising the ground for posterity (Wright 49). Instead, he argues that the site should be allowed to revert to its natural state: “As the ground was before, thus let it be; —” (Canto III, line 150). A field left unmarked avoids bestowing undue honour upon a single leader and allows the memory of the ordinary fallen to be respected.

Turner’s The Field of Waterloo: Against the “Pleasure Culture of War”

Byron’s poem, with its unflinching awareness of war’s goriness and its political hypocrisies, inspired Turner’s *The Field of Waterloo* (1818), which presents the stark aftermath of the battle. Exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1818, the painting was accompanied by the following lines from *Childe Harold*:

Last noon beheld them full of lusty life,
Last eve in Beauty's circle proudly gay,
The midnight brought the signal-sound of strife,
The morn the marshalling in arms, - the day
Battle's magnificently stern array!
The thunder-clouds close o'er it, which when rent
The earth is covered thick with other clay,
Which her own clay shall cover, heaped and pent,
Rider and horse, - friend, foe, - in one red burial blent!
(Canto III, lines 244-252)

Once continental Europe reopened to British travellers, Turner, like many of his contemporaries, visited Belgium, including a tour of the battlefield itself, where he produced extensive, annotated sketches of significant military positions from both sides (all now preserved in the *Waterloo and Rhine Sketchbook*, Tate Collection). His direct encounter with spaces pockmarked by the devastation shaped his artistic response to the tragedy. *The Field of Waterloo*, painted after his 1817 continental tour, was not merely a symbolic meditation but the outcome of lived experience. Deeply struck by the scale of fatalities, Turner created a canvas that emphasises not heroic triumph but the immense cost of war and the ravaging of human lives. The foreground shows an indistinct heap of dead soldiers, lit only by the torches of women—two carrying infants in their arms— who search for their loved ones among the fallen bodies. To the right, Château d'Hougoumont, an important defensive stronghold, is engulfed in flames, while in the background a rocket flares against the night sky (Shanes 136). Turner's work offers an unequivocal rejection of the idea of heroic sacrifice. Refusing to partake in what Catriona Kennedy calls the "pleasure culture of war," the painting denies viewers the consoling relief of victory. Its sombre, elegiac mood functions instead as a muted commemoration of the nameless dead soldiers and underscores the indiscriminate violence of the war, which spares neither the victors nor the vanquished.

Turner's decision to include women on the battlefield— a space traditionally seen as masculine and violent— demands attention. In *The Field of Waterloo*, one woman bends

over the heap of bodies in search of a loved one, while another, in the immediate foreground, collapses from grief and is supported by a companion. Felicia Hemans's poem "Women on the Field of Battle" (1827) similarly conveys the pathos of women entering war-ravaged sites to recover the bodies of their loved ones. Turner underscores this theme by including infants in their mothers' arms, figures of life and futurity juxtaposed against the corpses of fallen soldiers, who had themselves once represented the futures of their own nations. These infants accentuate the idea of motherhood as both a nurturing force and a metaphor for the nation, while also highlighting the rupture of the domestic unit during wartime.

This emphasis on familial loss aligns Turner's anti-war vision with themes developed by other women writers. Charlotte Caroline Richardson's poem "Tomorrow" (*Harvest*, 1818), as Stephen Behrendt notes, "...juxtaposes the external national concord produced by the war's end with the ongoing domestic struggle faced by women who have lost the men dearest to them" (95). Louisa Stuart Costello, whose father was killed in the Napoleonic wars, condemned the home front's uncritical exultation in her poem "On Reading the Account of the Battle of Waterloo" (*The Maid of the Cypress Isle*, 1815):

Oh when the glory does their hearts inspire,
Did they reflect what woes some bosoms fire?
Oh did their thoughts fly to the battle plain,
And mark the writhing agony and pain,
And hear the cries, and see the bleeding slain!
Ah! sure no more their hearts with joy would bound,
But shrink in horror from the vict'ry's sound. (lines 5-11)

Such poems represent a counter-triumphalist voice, shared by the famous poetess Anna Laetitia Barbauld, whose poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812) offered a trenchant anti-war critique. Though widely published and respected, Barbauld faced such hostility for this work that her reputation was irreparably damaged, forcing her to retreat from the literary sphere altogether. Taken together, these women writers,

alongside figures like Byron and Turner, offered a necessary dissenting voice in the predominantly triumphalist cultural response to Waterloo— one that rejected patriotic spectacle and insisted on remembering the war’s human cost (Behrendt 84).

Napoleon as Symbol: Caricature, Condemnation, Tragic Grandeur

If the Battle of Waterloo came to be regarded as an epochal event, so too did the figure of Napoleon, who haunted the imagination of artists, intellectuals, and statesmen throughout the early-nineteenth century. As Bainbridge observes, Bonaparte “dominated the European political and cultural scene in the first half of the nineteenth century” (451). Rising from being a military commander during the Revolution to First Consul in 1799, and crowning himself emperor in 1804, he extended his authority across much of Europe until his final defeat at Waterloo. Exiled thereafter to the remote island of St. Helena, a British territory in the South Atlantic, he remained confined until his death in 1821. Throughout these years, a considerable body of writing grappled with the meaning and consequences of this extraordinary figure. While his regime after the coup of 1799 became increasingly militaristic and imperialist, consolidating British opposition against this new aggressive threat (Bainbridge 460), some still attempted to reclaim him as a misunderstood son of the Revolution.

In Britain, Napoleon was a frequent subject of caricature, especially during the invasion scares of 1803. The satirical prints of Isaac and George Cruikshank and James Gillray alternately exaggerated or diminished his figure, rendering him grotesque and ridiculous. Such distortions mocked his imperial ambitions while at the same time diffusing popular anxiety (Kelley 355). As Theresa Kelley argues, “gigantism [became] a sign of Napoleon’s ambition as well as his power; miniaturization a sign of his oversized ego and, the English establishment hoped, his eventual defeat” (359). Gillray’s satirical print *Maniac-raving’s, or, Little Boney in a strong fit vide Lord W-, account of a visit to [the] Thuilleries* (1803) circulated widely, showing Napoleon as a diminutive, petulant figure in furious uproar over his failed military ventures, including the Egyptian campaign and invasion plans against Britain. His small stature and exaggerated gestures are made even more derisive by the depiction of his sabre,

broken in its sheath, dangling suggestively between his legs as a visual pun on his impotence.

Another anonymous satirical print of 1803, *Bonaparte snatching at the British crown: A rash attempt and woful downfall*, reverses the size of his figure. Here the French commander is depicted as a giant striding across the Channel to invade Britain, only to be struck down by the regular-sized figure of Britannia wielding her sceptre. Such images formed part of the diverse imaginings that his figure provoked. At the same time, Napoleon himself actively shaped his public image, commissioning the painter Jacques-Louis David to paint a series of *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (1801–05), presenting him as heroic successor to Hannibal, and later *The Coronation of Napoleon* (1807), which monumentalised his self-coronation in the grand, Neoclassical style. If French propaganda sought to glorify him, British caricature worked as a counterweight, puncturing this grandeur with ridicule.

While caricatures and satirical prints diminished Napoleon by rendering him grotesque or ridiculous, other responses grappled with the contradictions of the Revolutionary-turned-emperor in more complex ways (Bainbridge 453). Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1805, Book X) conveys his deep sense of disillusionment at Napoleon's betrayal of the Revolution's founding ideals, particularly in the act of crowning himself emperor and regressing into despotism and authoritarian rule:

... a Pope
Is summoned in to crown an Emperor —
This last opprobrium, when we see the dog
Returning to his vomit, when the sun
That rose in splendour, was alive, and moved
In exultation among living clouds,
Hath put his function and his glory off,
And, turned into a gewgaw, a machine,
sets like an opera phantom. (lines 939-947)

Byron, writing in the aftermath of Waterloo and from an ideological standpoint far removed from Wordsworth, offered a strikingly different account. His Waterloo stanzas in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* reaffirm the emperor's contradictory character (Bainbridge 453), but instead of condemning him outright, Byron casts Napoleon as a fallen hero, a figure of tragic magnitude:

There sunk the greatest, nor the worst of men,
 Whose spirit antithetically mixt
 One moment of the mightiest, and again
 On little objects with like firmness fixt,
 Extreme in all things! hadst thou been betwixt,
 Thy throne had still been thine, or never been;
 (Canto III, lines 317-322)

Though his defeat at Waterloo curtailed his ambitions and ended any hope of him regaining power, it could not diminish Napoleon's hold on the cultural imagination. Forrest notes that his fall and exile imbued his legacy with a pathos that resonated strongly with nineteenth-century Romantic writers (363). At St. Helena, Napoleon could be seen as a tragic figure whose fate neatly dovetailed with the Romantic idea of genius and its attendant condition of exile and alienation from society—psychological but often physical as well. Byron himself, living in self-imposed exile, wove this association into the autobiographical strains of *Childe Harold*. Louisa Costello, in her poem “Napoleon, on his Residence at St. Helena” (*The Maid of the Cypress Isle*, 1815), captures the melancholy of exile, depicting the emperor as a solitary figure contemplating nature's indifference from the confines of his island-prison.

Turner's War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet

Although Napoleon died in 1821 and was buried on St. Helena, his remains were returned to France in 1840 for a state funeral. This occasion inspired Turner's *War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet* (1842), a retrospective meditation on the emperor's downfall and isolation, painted almost two decades after his death. Turner depicts Napoleon in solemn military attire, arms crossed, his stance curiously elongated by its reflection in the water, as he gazes upon a small rock limpet (a mollusc with a conical shell). Behind him, a British sentry stands guard. Despite the visual extension of his form, the once-

mighty emperor is rendered small in comparison with the vast expanse of the sea and sky—reduced to a mere speck against the scale of time and history. The painting was first shown at the Royal Academy in 1842 with lines from Turner's unfinished poem *Fallacies of Hope*:

Ah! thy tent-formed shell is like
A soldier's nightly bivouac, alone
Amidst a sea of blood
but you can join your comrades.

The reference to soldiers in these lines, the lurid colouring of the sky, and the object which appears like a butcher-knife in the centre-right— all recall the immense loss of life and violence of the Napoleonic wars. Yet Turner offers pathos rather than judgement; the figure who once commanded countless men is now so diminished that even the smallest creature, the limpet, appears freer to him. In refusing to glorify the historic figure, Turner embraces a mode of romantic irony, instead of basking in nationalistic pride at the defeat and exile of Napoleon. Gerald Finley notes that limpets frequently symbolised imprisonment (109), underlining the island itself as a space of incarceration with no prospect of escape.

The reception of the painting was hostile, which was typical of Turner's later career. A *Literary Gazette* reviewer ridiculed "the continuous reflection" of Napoleon's boots, which made him appear "erected upon two long black stilts... truly ridiculous" (qtd. in Kelley 351). Yet the double image thus produced, whether deliberate or not, resonates with earlier caricatural traditions that alternately exaggerated and diminished Napoleon's body. In this way, the painting allegorises both phases of his career: the seemingly unbounded power of the pre-Waterloo emperor and his insignificance following his defeat and exile. The narrative Turner constructs points toward the cyclicity of power and the futility of man's hubris, where the rising sun of Napoleon's greatness is shown inexorably setting in sombre tones on the canvas.

Conclusion

The Battle of Waterloo and the figure of Napoleon remained central to the cultural imagination of nineteenth-century Britain, not merely as historical events but as symbols through which the nation's identity, anxieties, and aspirations were negotiated. In the wake of the battle, poets such as Southey and Wordsworth contributed to triumphalist narratives that celebrated Britain's military strength and victory, while others— including Byron, Hemans, Costello, Richardson, and Barbauld— registered dissent, mourning, and the ruptures of domestic life. This spectrum of responses reveals how Waterloo was remembered less as a final victory than as a contested cultural site, oscillating between glory and grief. Turner's *The Field of Waterloo* brought these tensions into the visual realm, aligning his canvas with counter-triumphalist voices that refused to aestheticize violence. By foregrounding anonymous suffering and the grief of women and families, Turner challenged the "pleasure culture of war" and created a visual elegy for the unacknowledged dead. Similarly, his later *War. The Exile and the Rock Limpet* re-engaged with Napoleon's memory, but not through the lens of national pride. Instead, the painting meditates on exile, futility of ambition, and the fragility of power, evoking romantic irony rather than patriotic triumph.

Like Turner's canvas, much of the work that represented or imagined Napoleon after his fall transformed the historical figure into an abstract concept— too multifarious to be pinned down. He became a site upon which competing narratives of power, defeat, glory, exile, genius, tyranny, and warning were projected. As Bainbridge observes, his image became one of the principal means by which Britain defined its national identity in contrast to the French "other"— a figure repeatedly staged, contained, and symbolically defeated across popular, literary, and visual culture (135). Yet the contradictory significations attached to his image— his symbolic volatility— persisted for decades after Waterloo. Seen in this light, Turner's paintings stand as both meditations on and confrontations with the many imaginings of the man and the myth. Taken together, these representations show how the aftermath of Waterloo was not simply a matter of commemoration but of negotiation— between victory and loss, nation and humanity, history and myth. Turner's works, in refusing triumphal closure,

insist that the meaning of history lies not in national pride but in the recognition of its human cost.

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Samara Rehman is a doctoral researcher in the English Department at the University of Delhi. Her thesis offers an art-historical analysis of J.M.W. Turner's maritime paintings, grounding them in the socio-historical experience of the long nineteenth century. Her research bridges art history, literary studies, and maritime studies offering new perspectives on Turner's engagement with Britain's nautical identity. She has previously taught English as a guest lecturer for two years at the NCWEB, University of Delhi.
